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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Editorial Commentary

-- "Lebanon lessons, the failure of individual peace deals"

Columnist Fahd Khitan writes on the inside page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (08/22): "The experience of the past few years of the peace process in the region proved that the individual deals were not only bad for the Arabs, but also for Israel. The Arabs went to Madrid for the sake of peace united and under one umbrella, but then chose to follow separate tracks.... Israel at the time considered the matter beneficial for it as it isolated the Arab countries and imposed its own conditions. In everyone's view, Israel was the biggest winner and the weak and torn Arabs were the losers. 12 years after the last individual peace deal, Israel found out that it had succeeded in establishing peace with the regimes and had failed to establish reconciliation with the Arab people. Strategists in Israel look at this Israel today as being tragic. The Arab regimes on the other hand have come to realize now that they had sacrificed their credibility and popularity with their people and won nothing in return.... A small country like Israel, no matter how much military power and American support cannot guarantee an eternal presence in the region without reconciliation with 350 million Arabs.... The individual and incomprehensive peace agreements have harmed Israel more than they did the Arabs for one main reason, and that is that the core issue of the conflict in the region continues to exist unsolved, and all the attempts to turn it into a simple Israeli Palestinian conflict were doomed to failure. After all, the Egyptian citizen who has regained his territory in line with the Camp David agreement, did not change his stand vis-`-vis Israel because the core of the conflict as far as he is concerned did not change.... In other words, the conflict in the region remains the same as it was before Camp David, an Arab Israeli conflict. This fact must be acknowledged by the Arab regimes. Hence, I believe that the Arabs and Israel are in need of a new peace process that completely ignores the existing agreements and puts the conflict back in its objective place so that just and comprehensive peace can really be achieved."

-- "The inevitability of war renewing"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back-page of centrist, independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (08/22): "Israeli officials believe in the inevitability of a new war with Hizbullah. Their belief is correct and in its place, but not because of the reasons that Israel uses to justify its repeated wars on Lebanon. The war will erupt against its causes continue to stand and exist

and because no one in Israel or the U.S. administration wants to address these causes. Israel sees itself as a victim of Arab hostility. Its conflict with the Arab is an existential struggle that has no links to its occupation of Arab lands. The Israel society closed its eyes to the real reasons for the conflict. It does not see the injustice of the occupation and does not sympathize with the suffering of the Palestinians. It views the destruction that its military machine is inflicting on the Arabs as being self defense in the face of a barbaric enemy that has no relation to human culture... and now it is canceling from its future considerations the major condition for achieving peace, the one that will prevent the occurrence of war every time the circumstances are opportune. So now there is no talk about a political solution for the Palestinian cause and there is no move to end the cause of tension with Lebanon by resolving the issues of Shebaa farms and the prisoners. Moreover, those who listened to the words of U.S. President George Bush yesterday will find other reasons for the inevitability of the war in Lebanon, and maybe in future, in places other than Lebanon. The American president adopted Israel's illogic in an absolute manner. He dwarfed the Lebanese crisis into its simplest form. All that concerns George Bush now is to establish a security zone that protects Israel and disarm Hizbullah. There is no mention of Shebaa farms, no mention of the prisoners, and no mention of the Palestinian cause, without a solution to which the Middle East will never have peace. The American president learned nothing from the Lebanon war, just as he failed to learn any useful lessons from his administration's weak performance in Iraq. The result is that the Arab region will continue to pay the cost of the American complete bias in favor of Israeli policies, leading only to the demise of all peace opportunities in the region."

-- "Israel at the crossroads: peace or the preventative and complementary war"

Columnist Oraib Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Ad-Dustour (08/22): "The drums of the upcoming war, be that preventative against Syria and Lebanon or complementary against Hizbullah, are beating loud in Tel Aviv. The important lesson that the Israeli military and the Hebrew intelligence forces learned is that they must not wait on Syria's missiles arsenal and on Hizbullah's rebuilding of its own arsenal, and they must not gamble on making Lebanon another Gaza. This is the conclusion that all Israelis of all schools of thought agree upon.... The internal debate in Israel is going to be influenced by the fallout from the Iranian nuclear issue. The United States is still at a loss about how to deal with that issue, and this confusion is going to lead to a similar confusion in dealing with Tehran's allies and friends in the region. Until Washington resolves its hesitancy and determines how it is going to deal with the Iranian issue, peacefully or through war, it is not expected that Israel is going to resolve which way it will head: negotiations for a serious peace process or preventative and complementary wars."

-- "A pivotal moment"

Centrist, elite English daily Jordan Times editorial (08/22) opines: "US President George W. Bush has rightly described the moment as 'pivotal' in the Middle East. Indeed, every year is pivotal around these parts. Where the American president's analysis somewhat stumbles is in his assertion that it is purely up to the people of the Middle East to choose between democracy and extremism, and that those are indeed the choices available.... Bush assured that the United States and its allies 'will defeat the terrorists by strengthening young democracies across the broader Middle East.' Does the president, by terrorist activity in Lebanon, mean the targeting of innocent Lebanese civilians and civilian infrastructure? Does he mean the military occupation of Lebanese land...? What freedom, Mr. President, in a region where democratically elected governments are sanctioned by Western powers? What open societies, Mr. President, when some regimes stay in power simply by allying themselves with Western and US interests over and above the interests of their own people? What democracy, Mr. President, in a region where occupiers are allowed unquestioned US support, and the largest political opposition blocs, the Islamic movements, are denounced as 'terrorists'? The only real democracy in the region is in something that isn't even a state, the Palestinian Authority. And we all know what reward the Palestinians received for exercising their democratic rights. Another country in the region that approaches a democracy is Lebanon, where America's

regional bulldog was recently allowed a free hand to murder and destroy. Yes, the people of the Middle East have choices to make and they are pivotal. Yes, there is an unhealthy fascination with destruction and mayhem and those who revel in it. Unfortunately, the West is included in those ranks. Unfortunately, the US in particular offers no alternative that is either ethical or acceptable. The US offers its way or the highway and that is no choice at all. Washington needs to understand that it too stands before a pivotal moment. It must, absolutely must, redefine its "war on terror," rethink its policies in the region, and reconsider its blind support for Israel. These are indeed options open to it that could rewrite Middle East history."

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